

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in this application.

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1 and 2 (Canceled).

3. (Previously Presented) A method of manufacturing a micromechanical component, the method comprising:

- providing a substrate having a front side and a back side;
- patterning the front side of the substrate;
- at least partially covering the patterned front side of the substrate with a protective layer containing germanium;
- patterning the back side of the substrate;
- at least partially removing the protective layer containing germanium from the patterned front side of the substrate; and
- forming a hard-surface mask on the front side of the substrate, the protective layer being formed selectively in openings in the hard-surface mask.

4. (Original) The method according to claim 3, further comprising applying the protective layer to an entire portion of the back side of the substrate.

5. (Previously Presented) A method of manufacturing a micromechanical component, the method comprising:

- providing a substrate having a front side and a back side;
- patterning the front side of the substrate;
- at least partially covering the patterned front side of the substrate with a protective layer containing germanium;
- patterning the back side of the substrate;
- at least partially removing the protective layer containing germanium from the patterned front side of the substrate;
- forming a first hard-surface mask on the front side of the substrate; and
- forming the protective layer over an entire surface of the first hard-surface mask.

6. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 5, further comprising forming the protective layer over an entire surface of a nucleation layer.

7. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 5, further comprising:

- forming a second hard-surface mask on the back side of the substrate; and
- etching a cavern into the back side when the front side is covered at least partially by the protective layer.

8. (Original) The method according to claim 7, further comprising:
after etching the cavern, removing the protective layer from the front side; and
subsequently etching trenches in a micromechanical function layer via a first
hard-surface mask.
9. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 7, wherein the protective layer is
also provided on the back side, and wherein the method further comprises:
patterning the protective layer on the back side to form the second hard-surface mask.